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ABSTRACT

A review of the annual report of Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc., regarding the activities of the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program, concluded that the program had not met its goals. It does not appear that the program will meet its statutory outcome goals of an 82 percent student graduation rate and a 70-75 percent employment rate, and the program did not meet its enrollment goal for the first year. The program suffered from start-up problems that appear to be due to the inactivity of its board of directors and the interim nature of program management assumed by Florida Department of Education staff. The result was that the job specialists hired by the school districts to administer the program in high schools received little training or supervision during the first year. The board has taken steps to improve program management and oversight by assigning responsibilities to itself and to Department of Education representatives for fiscal and general oversight. In addition, in June 1999, the board recruited and hired an experienced management team to supervise job specialists and administer the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program on a day-to-day basis. The review recommended that the board, the management team, and the Department of Education continue to define their roles as established in the July 1999 board meeting) and that the program management team actively monitor, train, assist, and support the job specialists in the schools. (KC)

oppaga Status Report

January 2000

Report No. 99-25



Jobs for Florida's Graduates Needs to Correct Start-Up Problems to Meet Statutory Goals

at a glance

- It does not appear that the program will meet its statutory outcome goals of an 82% student graduation rate and a 70-75% employment rate. The program did not meet its enrollment goal for the first year.
- The program suffered from start-up problems that appear to be due to the inactivity of its board of directors and the interim nature of program management assumed by Department of Education staff. The result was that the job specialists hired by the school districts to administer the program in high schools received little training or supervision during the first year.
- The board has taken steps to improve program management and oversight by assigning responsibilities to itself and to Department of Education representatives for fiscal and general oversight. In addition, the board recruited and hired an experienced management team in June 1999 to actively supervise job specialists and administer the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program on a day-to-day basis.

Purpose

Section 446.609(13)(a), F.S., requires the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to review the annual report submitted by Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc. (JAG), regarding the activities of the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program. Our review is to analyze reported program results and make any recommendations regarding the expansion, curtailment, modification, or continuation of the program.

Background

The Legislature created the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program in 1998 to help high-risk students make the transition from school to work.¹ The program targets high school seniors and provides services to help these students graduate and to either continue their education or find meaningful employment within nine months of their graduation. Florida's program is part of a 20-year nationwide initiative coordinated by the Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc., (JAG) based in Alexandria, VA. This organization is currently working with high school seniors in 28 states in the United States.

¹ Section 446.609, F.S.

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The program is governed by the Florida Endowment Foundation, which acts as a direct support organization for the program. The foundation's board has 15 members representing the public and private sectors. The board is to hire a management team to run the day-to-day operations of the program and is also charged with encouraging public and private support and contributions for the program. However, during the program's first year of operation, the board did not meet between August 1998 and July 1999, and a management team was not in place until June 1999.

The Jobs for Florida's Graduates management team is responsible for all of the program's day-to-day activities, including the training and supervision of job specialists, data collection, and conducting site visits to the participating high schools. A "job specialist" is hired to work with 35-45 students in each participating high school.

Job counselors serve as mentors. The program operates by identifying at-risk twelfth grade students and providing a variety of job counseling and training services. These students are selected by school managers and by job specialists employed by the program. The job specialists then meet regularly with the students to help them obtain specific job competencies.² Most of the job specialist's contact with a student is on a one-to-one, mentoring basis. There is also contact with students after classroom hours, particularly during the student-run Career Association instructional meetings. The job specialist is expected to meet periodically with the student and his/her parents and as an

advisor for the student-run Career Association, which comprises all students selected to the Jobs for Florida's Graduates program.

The job specialists also market the program to prospective employers and work to place students in quality jobs. The job specialists are to maintain contact with students for nine months after their graduation to help them either stay employed and advance in their job or to continue their education beyond high school while establishing a positive part-time work record. The job specialists are to work with between 35 and 45 students per year. Job specialists are hired by school managers but are to functionally report to the program's management team.

The Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program was established for an initial five-year period, starting in school year 1998-99. The program was required to operate in at least 25 schools (and no more than 50) in its first year of operation, with the goal of operating in at last 300 high schools by the end of the 2001-02 school year. Participating schools are selected by the foundation board and must enter into an agreement with the board that details the responsibilities of each party and the process and outcome goals for the program. The selected schools must be demographically and geographically representative of the state's population.

Legislative expectations increase during program's tenure. The Legislature established specific outcome goals for the program. Standards have been established for graduation rates, employment status, and earnings, with expectations increasing over the initial five years. For example, 82% of Jobs for Florida's Graduates first year participants are expected to graduate or earn their General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The outcome goals increase to 85% during Jobs for Florida's Graduates second

² The students are to gain 37 specific competencies that were developed in cooperation with the private sector. These competencies include such skills as selecting an immediate job goal, constructing a resume and conducting a job search, demonstrating time management, delivering presentations to a group, and demonstrating the ability to assume responsibility for actions and decisions.

year and to at least 90% during the final three years.

The Legislature appropriated \$1 million in start-up funding to the initial eight schools in the program in Fiscal Year 1998-99, half of which was placed into an investment account and the other half released to the foundation board. An additional \$836,000 was funded through federal school-to-work monies via the Florida Department of Education. The Legislature appropriated \$3 million for Fiscal Year 1999-2000. Although the JAG program encourages the development of private funding, none was obtained during the first year of the Jobs for Florida's Graduates program.

Performance

Full results of the program's first year of operation will not be available until after March 31, 2000. Preliminary data show that the program had not met its statutory outcomes as of November 1999, primarily due to start-up problems and the lack of managerial oversight. The board has taken steps to address these problems.

Preliminary outcome data indicate enrollment and graduation/job placement goals may not be met

The program's annual report showed that as of November 1999 the program had not met its performance standards for its initial year.

Enrollment. The program did not meet the goal to have the program operating in 25 schools in Fiscal Year 1998-99. Twenty-five schools were funded, but one school never opened the program, resulting in 24 schools being active for the entire school year. The funds allocated to the school that did not open its Jobs for Florida's Graduates program were returned. In addition, the program's job specialists did not meet the goal to work with an average of between 35

and 45 students in each school. According to the November 1999 Jobs for Florida's Graduates Placement Report, the 579 students who participated in the Jobs for Florida's Graduates program represented 66% of the minimum required caseload of 35 students per school. The minimum enrollment standard was met in only 7 of the 25 schools. In five schools the program served fewer than 10 students and the program reported that in four schools no students were served.

Graduation Rate. The statutory graduation outcome goals for Jobs for Florida's Graduates first year of operation is that at least 82% of statewide participants graduate or complete GED requirements by March 31 of the year following the end of the academic year in which the participants' respective high school classes graduated. As of November 1999, 72% had graduated or obtained a GED. The statutory expectation for the second year of operation is that 85% will meet this criterion and that in years three through five at least 90% will meet the criterion.

Employment/Enrollment. The statutory employment outcome goals for Jobs for Florida's Graduates first year of operation is that 70-75% of participants be employed a minimum of 40 hours per week in the civilian sector or the military or enrolled in postsecondary training education by March 31 of the year following the end of the academic year in which the participants high school classes graduated. As of November 1999, 14% of the Jobs for Florida's Graduates 417 participants who had graduated had obtained full-time employment and/or postsecondary enrollment. The statutory expectation for the second year is for 75-78% to meet this criterion, and in years three through five at least 80% will meet the criterion. (See Exhibit 1.)

Exhibit 1

**Jobs for Florida Graduates, Inc., Has Not Met Its First-Year
Statutory Expectations for Graduation and Employment Rates**

	Graduation Rate		
	Year 1 At least 82% graduated or completed GED	Year 2 At least 85% graduated or completed GED	Years 3-5 At least 90% graduated or completed GED
Statutory Mandate			
Jobs for Florida's Graduates results (as of November 1, 1999)	72%		

	Employment/Enrollment Rate		
	Year 1 80% employed 40 hours per week, in the military, or enrolled in postsecondary institution	Year 2 70%-75% employed 40 hours per week, in the military, or enrolled in postsecondary institution	Years 3-5 75%-78% employed 40 hours per week, in the military, or enrolled in postsecondary institution
Statutory Mandate			
Jobs for Florida's Graduates results (as of November 1, 1999)	14%		

Source: Section 446.609, F.S., and 1998-1999 S-12 Placement Report, Jobs for Florida's Graduates, Inc.

Earnings. The statutory outcome goals for earnings for the first year of operation is that the average wage for Jobs for Florida's Graduates participants who are working shall be at or above the national average wage for all participants in programs affiliated with Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc., by March 31 of the year following the end of the academic year in which the participants' respective high school classes graduated. The average hourly wage of the program graduates as of November 1999 was \$6.30. The nationwide figure will not be calculated until March 31, 2000.

The program experienced major start-up problems

Our review of the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program and an accreditation review conducted by the national Jobs for America's Graduates found that the program experienced several problems in its first year of operation. Many of these problems were likely due to inexperienced and unsupervised job specialists. These start-up problems likely contributed to the program not meeting its first-year performance goals. As a result of these problems, the national Jobs for America's

Graduates, Inc., awarded Probationary Accreditation status to Florida after its review of the program.

These start-up problems included issues noted below.

- The program experienced a leadership vacuum because the foundation board was inactive during the year. The board met in August 1998 and did not meet again until July 1999.
- The lack of a dedicated program management team at the statewide level necessitated that Department of Education staff assume interim program management responsibilities. The board did not hire a program management team until June 1999.
- As a result, the program's job specialists at the participating high schools did not receive significant supervision, training, and support.
- Although job specialists were hired on a 12-month basis, most did not provide services to students and employers during the summer months.

Program leadership was lacking. These problems were aggravated because the program's board was inactive during its initial year of operation. Following an initial meeting on August 31, 1998, the board did not meet again until July 21, 1999, which resulted in a leadership vacuum. Officers were not elected until the July 1999 meeting. As discussed in the accreditation report by Jobs for America's Graduates, Inc., the program's first year of operation was characterized by uncertainty about which entities were responsible for performing necessary functions.

For example, there was confusion over who would be responsible for activities such as negotiating and executing contracts with schools, providing administrative services, developing agreements with schools regarding the duties of job specialist positions, and serving as bank account signatories. Further, there was no dedicated program management team in place from August 1998 to June 1999 to monitor, supervise, and train the job specialists.

Limited training for job specialists. The program's job specialists, who work with students and employers, are a key to the program's success because they provide the program's direct services. However, the job specialists were not all hired at the beginning of the school year. Eight job specialists, whose positions were funded by Florida legislative appropriation, started at the beginning of the school year. The rest of the job specialists were funded through federal school-to-work funds which were not available until October 1, 1998.

Training and oversight of the job specialists was limited during the year. To provide initial training to these staff, the interim program managers contracted with Florida International University's Institute for Workforce Competitiveness. The institute met the conditions of the contract by conducting initial training for the job specialists and providing support to these staff via telephone. However, the institute was not required to and did not conduct

on-site training visits to the individual high schools. As a result, data was input late and incorrectly, and very few schools achieved all of the prescribed job competencies.

The brevity of the initial training and the lack of any follow-up training in the field, resulted in the job specialists not understanding the importance of data input, how to manipulate the Jobs for America's Graduates database, or how to efficiently implement the 37 job competencies. Job specialists must record a large amount of data on the students they serve, including student competencies and the graduation and employment barriers they face. The job specialists experienced the greatest data entry problems with inputting the Student Profile and Student Contact forms, which are vital to the assessment of initial student needs and accounting for activities performed by job specialists.

In addition, the job specialists must also document their monthly activities, student and employer contacts, and job placement and follow up activities. These data are critical because they are used to determine whether the program is meeting the performance standards set by Florida law. In addition to the problems associated with specific forms, no data at all was input from some schools, and the data that was received was often input late and was frequently filled with mistakes.

Most job specialists did not work during the summer. Although the program is intended to provide year-round support to high-risk students, most (21 of the 24) job specialists did not work in the summer. Because of the importance of these months for follow-up with students and prospective employers, as well as job counseling, it is important that the job specialists be active in the summers. Because the job specialists were funded for a 12-month period, they were expected by JAG to work in the summer. According to program staff in the Department of Education, funding for the salaries and benefits for the job specialists

who did not work in the summer was returned to the department. No program expenditures occurred during the summer as a result of the 20 job specialists who did not work.

The board has taken steps to address these problems

The program has taken steps to address these problems. The foundation's board has been active during the program's second year of operation, having met in person and/or by conference call in July, August, and September 1999 and has clarified the roles and responsibilities of the board, the program's management team, and the Department of Education.

Under this clarified vision, the board will provide overall program oversight and direction, while the board's management team will concentrate on day-to-day operations and the program's implementation in Florida. The management team will train and closely monitor all of the job specialists' activities, and especially those involved with data input. The Department of Education will serve as the fiscal agent for the program's office purchases and travel expenses and will oversee day-to-day operations as necessary.

In June 1999, the board appointed a new management team that has extensive experience in implementing the program in other states, including urban, suburban and rural areas. Program results in the second and third years will provide information on whether this new leadership team has been successful.

Conclusion and Recommendations —

The Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program experienced start-up problems in its first year of operation, including limited training and oversight of program staff and confusion about program roles and responsibilities. It seems unlikely the program will have met its statutory performance standards for the 1998-99 school year, although final data will not be available until after March 2000. However, the program's board and management have taken steps to address the start-up problems.

Based on the recent program improvements, we concluded that the Legislature should continue the program on the condition that Jobs for Florida's Graduates meets its statutory outcome goals by March 31, 2001.

In addition, the Legislature and the program's board of directors should consider the recommendations below.

- We recommend that the board, the management team, and the Department of Education should continue to define their roles as established July 1999.
- We recommend that the program management team actively monitor, train, and assist the job specialists in the schools, and ensure that data input problems that occurred during the program's first year are corrected.
- We recommend that the board, in conjunction with the school districts and the management team, work to ensure that job specialists are providing 12 months of service and support to Jobs for Florida's Graduates participants.

Agency Response



Tom Gallagher
Commissioner

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-0400

January 18, 2000

Mr. John W. Turcotte, Director
The Florida Legislature
Office of Program Policy Analysis and
Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Claude Pepper Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Mr. Turcotte:

This letter is in response to your preliminary findings and recommendations regarding start-up problems identified with the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program.

First, let me thank you for conducting a thorough study on the Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program. Mr. Dick Brand has done an outstanding job of gathering the necessary information needed to compile this report, and I wish to thank him for working closely with staff assigned to this program.

Upon review of this status report, I find that the preliminary performance data displayed in this document is accurate. The start-up problems identified were indeed the cause of the program not meeting its targeted goals. As stated in your report, the Board as well as staff has taken steps to address all the problems identified. We agree with the recommendations presented in your report and have, in fact, begun to implement your proposed recommendations.

The Jobs for Florida's Graduates Program has much to offer at-risk students in Florida. With corrective action already being taken, I believe this will become a viable program in the State of Florida.

Your continued support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Tom Gallagher in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Tom Gallagher

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Project supervised by Jane Fletcher (850/487-9255)

Project conducted by Dick Brand (850/487-9244)